

VZCZCXYZ0000
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHDM #0348/01 1011354
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 111354Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3291
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 6713
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4452
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3068
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7603
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1673
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5007
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 1217
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCPA//
INFO RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA 7342

UNCLAS DAMASCUS 000348

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: Special Report: Wolf, Pelosi and Issa Codels (April 2-6)

11. Summary: Syrian papers welcomed the visit to Damascus by members of US House of Representatives Frank Wolf, Joe Pitts, and Robert Aderholt on March 30-31, Speaker Nancy Pelosi and six other Representatives on Apr. 3-4, and Representative Darrell Issa on Apr. 15.

The three government-owned dailies on Apr. 2 published only the brief Syrian News Agency reports on the meetings that Wolf, Pitts and Aderholt held with President Asad and FM Mouallem in Damascus on Apr. 1, offering no further reporting and making no comment.

Independent al-Watan, on the other hand, referred to the statement that the three representatives issued after the meetings, describing it as "a slap in the face of the hoped-for Syrian-American dialogue." The paper said the Representatives' statement "reiterated the US Administration's demands of Syria and brought us back to square one." From the statement, al-Watan quoted the following: "During all our meetings, we raised the need to prevent foreign fighters who kill innocent American and Iraqi soldiers from entering Iraq via Syria and the need to halt support for Hizbollah and HAMAS and to recognize Israel's right to exist in peace and security and to stop interference in Lebanon." Al-Watan also quoted the visitors' statement that they met with "businessmen, religious leaders, former political prisoner and current opposition leader Riad Seif, and other members of Syrian civil society."

In another article on Apr. 2, entitled "Damascus Sees in US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi's Visit an Opportunity for Dialogue," al-Watan quoted an unnamed high ranking Syrian official as saying the following: "Damascus views this visit with interest, as it appreciates Pelosi's positions, which represent American public opinion as revealed by the latest election, especially the opposition to the war on Iraq and the need to find a peaceful solution to the problem through dialogue with the influential powers in the region." "Damascus finds in visit of the Speaker of the US House of Representatives an opportunity to express its position and explain that Syria has never been part of the problems of the region and that the problem lies with the US Administration's ideology, which Pelosi and the American voters reject." "The meeting with Pelosi is an opportunity for the dialogue that Syria calls for and considers to be the solution to the problems of the region."

Papers reported Pelosi's arrival in Damascus on Apr. 3 and her

meetings with President Asad, VP Shara and FM Mouallem on Apr. 4. Headlines featured President Asad's statement to Pelosi that "direct dialogue could clarify a number of realities and tackle the main issues which are of mutual concern between Syria and the US, as well as the security of the region". "The visit of Mrs. Pelosi and the accompanying delegation to Syria conveys a clear message that dialogue and peace are the common language among nations," President Asad added.

President Asad renewed Syria's commitment to peace, referring to the role played by Syria and the US since the launch of peace process in Madrid, to the following negotiations, and to Syria's adoption of the Arab peace initiative, a fact that proves the credibility of Syria's peace approach as a strategic option.

On Iraq, the President underlined Syria's keenness for Iraq's unity, independence, stability and security through a comprehensive national reconciliation and a timetable for the withdrawal of foreign troops.

"Accordance among the Lebanese is the basic factor to tackle the main issues which guarantee restoration of stability in Lebanon," President Asad said.

Mrs. Pelosi stressed that her visit to Syria aims at "opening horizons of dialogue between Syria and the US to deal with the main regional issues," pointing to the positive impressions she and her accompanying delegation took from Syria.

Pelosi described her talks with President Asad as productive, saying "we came in friendship, hope, and determined that the road to Damascus is a road to peace."

"Our visit to Syria was very necessary based on the recommendations of the Baker-Hamilton Committee on Iraq and on the determination of Head of the House Foreign Affairs Committee to visit Syria," Mrs. Pelosi told a news conference with FM Mouallem.

She added, "the talks of the US delegation in Damascus concentrated on the necessity of achieving peace in the Middle East, combating terrorism, and regional issues", stressing that peace in the Middle East is a priority for the American people, the region and the world.

Mrs. Pelosi expressed relief over President Asad's reassurances made to the US delegation that Syria was ready to resume the peace process in the Middle East.

FM Mouallem underscored Syria's readiness to engage in dialogue, based on mutual respect, renewing Syria's commitment to achieve a just and comprehensive peace based on Israeli withdrawal from occupied Arab lands, including the Syrian Golan.

"Differences in viewpoint between Syria and the US is because of the absence of dialogue and because Syria lives in this region which witnesses disorder," FM Mouallem said, describing the visit as a contribution to narrowing those differences.

"Syria is ready to realize a just and comprehensive peace according to the Arab peace initiative," he reiterated.

On HAMAS, Mouallem said it is a basic part of the political process in Palestine, having won the elections there.

Regarding Iraq, the Syrian Minister added, "We explained to the US delegation the measures taken by Syria to prevent any infiltration along the Syrian-Iraqi borders," noting the formation of Syrian and Iraqi committees for the purpose.

On Lebanon, Minister Mouallem said Syria aspires to excellent relations with brotherly Lebanon based on encouraging dialogue among the Lebanese parties to reach national accord. He denied any arms' smuggling from Syria to Lebanon.

"This visit paves the way for a constructive dialogue in the future to establish best relations between the Syrian and American peoples," FM Mouallem added.

Government-owned Al-Thawra on Apr. 3 cited Syrian Ambassador in Washington Imad Mustafa's press statement describing Pelosi's visit as a "positive step." He noted that leaders of both the Democratic and Republican parties "have made many public statements on the need for public engagement in a dialogue with Syria." "According to media reports, the US Administration was shocked by the visit. I read in The New York Times that President Bush personally intervened to prevent the visit, but Pelosi said she came based on the recommendations of the Baker-Hamilton committee." The ambassador said the visit is "part of the calm dialogue and a reminder of the basic fact that we might have different policies but we must remain diplomatically engaged in a dialogue to reach some understandings."

All papers on Apr. 4 featured Pelosi's press statement in Beirut on Apr. 3 describing her visit to Damascus as important and expressing hope that reciprocal trust could be built by this visit.

Papers on Apr. 6 reported President Asad's meeting on Apr. 5 with Representative Darrell Issa. Talks dealt with developments in the region and means and mechanisms to start relations on a correct basis between Syria and the United States. Issa also met with FM Mouallem, who emphasized Syria's commitment to dialogue with the US on all issues and asserted the importance of the recent visits paid by US Congressmen to Damascus for finding solutions to the problems of the region. Issa reiterated the importance of continuing dialogue between Syria and the US, adding that "the latest visits by US Congressmen to Syria constitute a new start for joint action to solve pending issues between the two countries." Issa said his meeting with President Asad was "very constructive." In a press statement at the end of his talks in Damascus, Issa underscored that he joins his voice to that of Pelosi and supports the recommendations of the Baker-Hamilton Committee regarding the necessity of dialogue with Syria. "At some point we will have a new Ambassador," he said.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"Pelosi talks about opening horizon for dialogue, confirming her good impressions. President Asad: Dialogue and peace are common language among peoples... Syria is committed to peace as a strategic option" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/5)

"Speaker of US House of Representatives Pelosi leaves Damascus with good impressions: Damascus is the road to peace. FM Mouallem: We are ready to realize a just and comprehensive peace according to the Arab peace initiative" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 4/5)

"Information Minister Bilal: Speaker of US House of Representatives Pelosi's visit to Syria was fruitful and positive" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/5)

"President Asad reviews the situation in Iraq and the region with a delegation of US House of Representatives. FM Mouallem: The dialogue is to reach common denominators that would help find solutions to the crises in the region" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/2)

"Pelosi, Welcome to dialogue. Mustafa, Syrian Ambassador to Washington: A positive step towards a calm dialogue" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 4/3)

"Pelosi in Beirut: Syria has hope for trip to Syria" (Government-owned Syria Times, 4/3)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"And Pelosi to Damascus"

Izz-al-Din al-Darwish, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (4/3): "US legislators from both the Republican and Democratic parties realize that there is disorder in US policy

toward the region. They also realize that they have to work to redress this disorder, beginning with the mistakes of the war on Iraq and relations with Syria and ending with US foreign policy in general.

"In this context come the visits to Syria by US parliamentary delegations from the Republican and Democratic parties. These visits will reach their highest point tomorrow with US House of Representatives Speaker Pelosi's visit....

"Ms. Pelosi comes to Damascus with a large number of facts collected by previous delegations on the true Syrian constructive role in dealing with the issues of the region. This role was accurately sensed by the US Republican Representatives who came to Damascus before her -- Frank Wolf, Joe Pitts, and Robert Aderholt....

"Everyone, both in and outside the United States, knows that Syria is open to dialogue with the US administration.... Syria is interested in listening to US views and ensuring that Americans know its true stands.

"People can remove a lot of misunderstanding and learn about policies through dialogue and discussion....

"Syria is known at the world level for being committed to international legitimacy. It does not need to present evidence in this respect, and Americans know this fact well. Syria has asserted to them many times that it is interested in working with the neighboring states to help Iraq overcome its tragedies, proceeding from the fact that Iraq is a fraternal country and a neighbor.

"Syria also asserted to Americans that it is interested in re-launching the peace process and achieving peace, security, and stability in the region in accordance with the Arab peace initiative and on the basis of the relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

"That is Syria before, during, and after the visits by Ms. Pelosi and other US officials: Inclination toward constructive dialogue, efforts to achieve peace, security, and stability, and adherence to international charters.

"Ms. Pelosi, welcome to Damascus, and there is great hope that balance will be restored to US policy in the region."

"Dialogue Is the Route to Understanding"

Umar Jaftali, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, said (4/3): "Pelosi will find out in Damascus that Syria reaches out for a serious and sincere dialogue with US officials and that Syria's true image is different from the one that entails unfairness and preconceptions....

"The US House speaker will personally see the truth of Syria's position and the extent of its seriousness in solving all pending problems, whether to establish security in the region or to build fruitful and constructive relations with the United States....

"Pelosi knows that Syria has an important and constructive role based on the criteria of justice and the international resolutions, and that it is not possible to do without Syria in any serious attempt to correct the accumulating mistakes, from the problem of the Israeli occupation of Arab land to Israel's failure to comply with UN resolutions, which upsets the balance in the region, to the situation in Iraq....

"Syria has always stressed that dialogue, not estrangement, is the way to reach understanding and establish correct and balanced relations....

"We have great hope in the results of Pelosi's visits and dialogue. Pelosi, who is welcome in Syria, might, through her visit, help correct the situation and restore balance to Syrian-American relations."

"Pelosi's Visit"

Ahmad Dawwa, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawrah, wrote (4/3): "Pelosi's visit to Syria shows that US officials are convinced of the importance of dialogue with Syria and of Syria's key role in the region.... Also, the visit reflects an explicit admission that Bush's policy of isolating Syria has failed...."

"Statements by Pelosi and Democrats in general about Syria and problems of the region, which substantially disagree with Bush's policy, open the door for a serious and constructive dialogue between Syria and the United States to find acceptable common denominators about the sensitive issues in the region and, consequently, prevent deterioration in the region's security and stability...."

"Syria welcomes Pelosi's visit and any visit by any American official who opts for dialogue and cooperation to solve the problems of the region. Those who believe Syria will offer concessions or bargain over its rights are wrong. All that Syria wants is to spare the region further damage as a result of the US Administration's policy and to safeguard Arab rights. If any party must make concessions, then it is the US Administration, which believed that pressure could force Syria to change its positions...."

"Pelosi's visit to Syria acquires its importance from the delicate and sensitive situation in the region and from the position that Pelosi occupies at the helm of the US House of Representatives...."

"Pelosi is in Damascus not because she loves this beloved city but because she realizes that it is impossible to ignore Syria's role. Others, who also realize this fact, need to wake up."

"Importance of the Visit is in the Event Itself"

Muhyi-al-Din al-Muhammad, a commentator in government-owned Tishrin, wrote (4/3): "Pelosi's visit to Damascus is an important step in the right direction because it is part of Syria's dialogue with the United States and the rest of the world and because the US House of Representatives Speaker strongly opposes the war in Iraq and knows that the problems of the region are connected and that Syria can play an important role in finding solutions...."

"It can, therefore, be said that the importance of the visit lies in the visit itself, regardless of the results it will produce. This is because this visit by the Speaker of the House of Representatives revives the Syrian-American dialogue over issues of the region. It is also consistent with Syria's desire to push the political process in Iraq forward, help Lebanon overcome its problem, and revive the Middle East peace process based on the terms of reference of the Madrid conference and the relevant UN resolutions, especially Resolutions 242, 338, and 194, while taking into consideration what was accomplished before the suspension of the negotiations between Syria and Israel...."

"Syria today receives Nancy Pelosi with an open heart and mind and with deep realization that it is difficult, if not impossible, to have identical views on all the issues that might be raised on the discussion table. But we trust that the continuation and deepening of the dialogue is a demand by Syria and the countries of the region, and that if the dialogue does not help attain all the desired results, it at least revives hope for reduced tension and for better results in the next dialogue rounds, no matter how long it takes."

"Dialogue and Respecting the Other"

Isam Dari, Chief Editor of government-owned Tishrin, commented (4/4): "With all realism, we acknowledge that Mrs. Pelosi's visit, important as it is, will not be able to remove all the obstacles blocking the restoration of Syrian-US relations to normalcy or overcome the phase of misunderstanding or dissipate the heavy dark clouds that hover in the sky of these relations and prevent mutual understanding and dialogue. However, this does not mean that the visit will not achieve any positive results. Although we do not consider the mere visit as a positive development irrespective of the results that it will produce, we believe that the dialogue which she will hold in Damascus will be of great importance...."

"The Hot Spot"

Khalid al-Ashhab, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (4/4): "Pelosi's visit to Damascus is the first cloud of the white smoke that began to appear and clear the air of the Syrian-American relations."

"If President Bush's administration, through the policies of injustice, occupation, and repression, failed to answer the historic American question 'why do they hate us?' that was asked after 9/11, then Mrs. Pelosi and her team, who are willing to uphold and translate the true American values, are able, if they want, to make the world once again yearn for America's culture and high ethical values...."

"Back to Square One"

Thana al-Imam, a commentator in independent al-Watan, said (4/2): "The statement that three US Republican Congressmen issued at the end of a visit to Damascus was something like a slap in the face of the hoped-for dialogue between Syria and the United States...."

"The American statement contained no reference to the need to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the region and strongly supported President George Bush's strategy in Iraq."

"The congressmen called for stopping support for Hizbollah and HAMAS, preventing fighters from crossing into Iraq, recognizing Israel's right to live in peace, and refraining from intervening in Lebanon.... This means that we are back to square one. For these American demands have not changed for more than three years...."

"The statement also achieved a US objective through the announcement that the representatives met with Riyad Sayf, former People's Assembly member, especially since the US administration allocated funds to support the Syrian opposition, something that Damascus does not view with satisfaction...."

"Observers believe that the only positive thing in the Congressmen's statement was their call for a strong diplomatic effort to address the unresolved issues in the region. And even here, the Congressmen failed to specify that the main problem in the region is the Arab-Israeli conflict...."

"The official Syrian report on the Representatives' meeting with President Asad was very brief.... This proves that the US Representatives' visit to Damascus was not as successful as was hoped for."

"Pending the arrival in Damascus of Nancy Pelosi, it is clear that Syria is left with no option but to wager on the contradictions between the Republican Party, which controls the White House, and the Democratic Party, which controls the Congress, to serve its interests, especially through a search for solutions to the issue of a just and comprehensive peace, to start with."

Corbin